

Flanders: national level case study

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General introduction

The state structure and its consequences

The Flemish policy on education cannot be understood without taking into account the former Belgian political structures and governmental policies. Belgian politics were dominated by three cleavages: socio-economic, linguistic, and religious. The linguistic and the religious division also prevailed in higher educational policy making. Problems could only be solved when the balances in each of these cleavages were retained (consociational democracy). As these cleavages pulled together to form a division between Flanders and Wallonia, the demand for the establishment of a federal state became stronger.

The first step towards self-regulation in educational matters for Flanders and Wallonia was taken in 1969, when two Belgian ministries of education (one for the Dutch speaking educational system and one for the French speaking) were established. The constitutional reform of 1970 (the third in Belgian history) established three Communities and three Regions. In 1980 the Communities formally became responsible for education, but with so many exceptions that *de facto* no real policy could be developed. After all, it resulted in a complex and indistinct regulation. As a result, the regulation on higher education did not see any major developments from the law of 1971 onwards, except for saving plans imposed by the national government. The last legislative action was taken in 1977, when college education was partially reformed. The national policy on education in general was politicised, lacked continuity, and was strongly centralised.

From the moment that Flanders could develop its own educational policy, this policy was aimed at avoiding these dysfunctions of the Belgian system. To do differently and better was the strongly emphasised priority. In the field of higher education, as in other policy areas, this was translated into the principles of autonomy, deregulation and responsibility.

Since the state reform of 1988, Flanders has the full autonomy over the field of education. Only three areas still remain federal (national): the duration of compulsory education, the minimal conditions for granting diplomas, and pension plans. As such,

they form a relatively stable framework. One major change occurred in 1983: education was made compulsory up till the age of 18.

Key innovations in higher education

The Flemish Community opted in its decree of 12 June 1991 on universities and that of 13 July 1994 on colleges for deregulation through a fundamental transfer of responsibility to individual educational institutions. The government abandoned central regulation (which developed historically) and defined tasks and responsibilities through framework decrees. The government now provides the necessary financial resources and holds the institutions accountable for their use within certain minimum limits. In principle, control is exercised in retrospect. The government has also established a quality assurance system, but has made the institutions themselves primarily responsible for its application. A choice has thus been made for greater local autonomy, which entails a certain amount of deregulation. On the other hand, the government has imposed rules on higher education to hold back uncontrolled expansion of the course supply and hence to guarantee a minimum level of quality.

The overall approach is based on a number of principals running through the new regulations.

- Greater administrative autonomy for the former national state universities which have been given independent legal status. The same applies to the so-called ARGO colleges which are now Flemish autonomous colleges.
- Increased scope for individual policy-making on the part of the universities and colleges.
- Adequate specification of the task and identity of university education and those of college education.
- Renewed educational organisation and improved ordering of the course supply.
- Safeguarding the basic rights of the student.
- Drafting of a framework for a flexible policy towards personnel and employment conditions at universities and colleges.
- Promoting the internationalisation of higher education and scientific research.
- Developing an adequate quality assurance system for higher education. The research council was confirmed as the quality assurance instrument for scientific research.
- Developing an adequate costing model for higher education.

Administration and consultation

The new regulations pay a great deal of attention to administrative forms and consultation at all levels which make a fundamental contribution to fulfilling the mission of higher education institutions. The earlier state institutions have been granted autonomy and the make-up and powers of their administrative bodies have been established by decree. Although the government does not have the power to impose an administrative structure on private schools, staff and student representation has been guaranteed by decree. All of these institutions are obliged, moreover, to set up an education and a research board.

The overall administrative and consultative concept must accord with the following four principles:

1. Legitimation: determination of general administrative rules, examination and education rules, the main outlines of the organisation and co-ordination of education and research; drafting of a policy plan, a budget and the main outlines of personnel policy.
2. Scrutiny: approval of the colleges and universities' annual accounts and reports by Flemish government commissioners. The sole duty of the commissioners is to ascertain whether policy is being pursued in accordance with the law. They are not required to form an opinion on whether or not this policy is appropriate. The legitimacy of financial transactions at the universities is monitored by an inspector of finances, who assists the Flemish government commissioners in this respect.
3. Representativeness: involvement of representatives from all levels of the university or college community and from societal organisations.
4. Administrative openness.

Some important dates

- 1969: The Belgian Ministry of National Education is split in two parts: one part for the Flemish speaking part of the country and one for the French speaking part.
- 1970: The law on the restructuring of higher education put forward the unity of higher education under different modalities (university education, long type higher education and short type higher education).
- 1971: Law on the funding and control of universities. This was the last framework

law concerning universities preceding the law of 1991.

- 1980: Part of the educational competence is federalised to the Communities.
- 1988 / 89: The entire competence over education is federalised, except for the duration of compulsory education, the minimal conditions for granting diplomas, and pension plans.
- 1991: Universities Decree.
- 1994: Colleges Decree.

1. policies and programmes at national level

1.1. traditional degree programmes

- development of new programmes (whole or components/modules) with a greater or more explicit vocational emphasis
- re-orienting or adjusting the content or methods of existing programmes
e.g. placements, (re)training academic staff, employer representatives as tutors, internationalisation of curricula or of the student experience
- student access policies (overall participation and of particular social groups) and the economic and non-economic rationales behind them
- changing balance of student enrolments, increasing the proportion of students on courses with perceived high economic relevance

* new programmes

- KU Leuven established the interfaculty programme '*Initiatie tot Ondernemen*' (Initiation to Entrepreneurship) in 1997. The programme teaches students of the second and third cycle how to undertake in an innovative way. Some of the lectures are given by entrepreneurs. The students have to develop a business plan. This must be presented as part of the exams. The exams are partly evaluated by the entrepreneurs.
- As a result of changing societal demands, universities have developed several 'master studies', e.g. Master of Business Administration.
- The same happened in colleges, which developed courses to cope with specific demands of certain sectors, e.g. transport, public relations, mechanics. These courses have an explicit vocational emphasis.

It is not clear yet which role the government has played in the development of these new teaching programmes. The least that can be said is that the government has allowed these initiatives to be taken. But it is likely that these new programmes should rather be part of the institutional case studies than of the national level study.

* existing programmes

- placements: The government deemed it necessary for colleges to give placements a part in the curriculum and obliged them to do so in the last year of the college study. But from the moment that the colleges were given autonomy, the organisation of placements was not longer a priority for them.

- Several measures were taken by the government to position the Flemish higher education institutions internationally. Often statements are made about the necessity of guaranteeing the international competitiveness of these institutions. The following measures were taken:

- implementing the European directive of 21 December 1988 on the general system of recognition for higher education diplomas awarded upon completion of professional training courses lasting at least three years;

- permitting international co-operation agreements in the field of education and research (joint diplomas);

- simplifying the recognition procedure for foreign diplomas and study periods;

- participating in European education programmes;

- appointing guest professors and foreign lecturers;

- making students who are subject of an EU member state eligible for subsidy;

- adopting the European study point system (ECTS);

- granting the institutions autonomy in the formulation of course programmes and organisation of the academic year. This should enable institutions to offer education that ties in more effectively with the programmes and timetables of foreign students.

But on the other hand the educational language still remains Dutch. Participation in higher education can be made dependent of a language exam. Foreign students have to prove that they can understand Dutch sufficiently to follow courses. The decrees of 1991 and 1994 make it possible to give a certain amount of the courses in another language (20% for universities, no limit for colleges). Post-graduate courses also can be, and often are taught in another language. The institutions particularly try to attract post-graduate students. The decrees also make it possible to appoint visiting professors.

* access

Traditionally, all forms of higher education in Belgium and in Flanders are freely accessible. Only pupils with a vocational secondary education qualification cannot enter higher education.

The democratisation of higher education has been a major topic in the past and has its effects on to the present day. The open access system is promoted through:

- a student grant system. The grants from this year onwards will be automatically indexed. There has been a rise in income limit of 10 %. For university students, 30,493 grants amounting on average 48,360 BEF were given in 1995-1996. Students who are eligible for such a grant, also benefit from other advantages. Their parents receive a children's allowance up till the age of 25, and also receive a tax reduction, the students can get reduced fees for public transportation, social provisions at universities and recently also at colleges.
- limiting by decree the possible amount of the enrolment fees and exam fees. An exception is made for post-graduate studies.
- the geographical spread of the universities. Recently the need for a greater student mobility is emphasised among others by the government, but research shows that most students still go to a university or college nearby.

All these measures haven't ruled out certain hidden selection mechanisms (financially, structurally, socio-economically).

* enrolment

Some exceptions on the open access policy are made:

- an entrance exam for students in engineering;
- an entrance exam for students in medicine and dentistry. This exam took place for the first time in 1997, not without some preceding problems. The exam should comprise two parts (one part to test the knowledge of maths and sciences and another part to test the capacity for knowledge processing), but the *Arbitragehof* (Arbitration Court) objected to the first part. Therefore, only the part of knowledge processing capacity was tested in 1997. From 1998 onwards, both parts will be tested. Students who fail to pass the test, can try it again the same year and the next year (3 times in total);
- for students in rehabilitation and physiotherapy there will probably be a federal law in 2003 to fix the number of students that is allowed to graduate. Therefore, the

Flemish government wants to introduce an entrance exam. It also wanted to reorganise this course, but the lobby of universities and colleges was able to prevent this from happening;

- some trends are influenced by information campaigns in secondary education (e.g. campaigns to encourage girls to choose more for courses with better employment prospects; the organisation of 'science weeks' to interest young people in higher education);

- in colleges, there is an artistic entrance exam for courses in audiovisual and fine arts and courses in music and drama, and an ability test for basic training of courses in nautical sciences.

Apart from these exceptions to the open access principle, the choice of enrolment is left to the student's own choice. This freedom of choice has led to enrolment patterns that closely resemble those of other countries. Courses which guaranteed easy access to the labour market (e.g. economy, engineering, law) gained a lot of students, whereas courses giving access to the education sector or the public administration sector (where new employment is becoming rare) saw their student numbers diminishing. In the nineties, this connection between choice of study and labour market is not so clear. More and more graduates are employed in sectors that are not closely related to their study. This is especially the case for graduates in humane and basic sciences, who traditionally were employed in the public and education sector. They now increasingly try to find work in the private sector. Of the young university graduates some 40 % is employed in enterprises of the private sector. This is a near doubling in 25 years time.

Overall, the unemployment rate of the high educated is low. But they are increasingly doing work below their capacity (9 % on average, but up to 30 % in the social sciences). As a consequence, demand for a higher education diploma increases and the low educated are driven from the labour market.

Notwithstanding the decreasing birth rates, the participation in higher education still increases (more than 50 % of 18 year olds enter higher education).

The functioning of the free market has been (and partly still is) fortified by the financing system based on student numbers.

Higher education institutions react to this employment developments:

- a vocational drift in universities
- the development of high-level refresher courses and retraining courses. Many young university graduates complement their vocational training with a supplementary university diploma.

An important development is that other circuits offering vocational training/education are developing. Especially 'OSP' (see 1.2.), which does not only contain higher education, has become more important over the last few years.

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| <p>1.2. <i>new educational structures for working-learning relationships</i> lifelong learning, dual structures, sandwich courses</p> |
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The measures taken by the government regarding new educational structures, mainly are an expression of its will to give people who have fallen behind a second chance. As far as real lifelong learning structures are concerned, the government leaves the initiative to the educational field itself. Nevertheless, some developments and measures can be distinguished:

- With respect to distance learning, there is a clear aim to develop it into a multimedia and modular education system.
- At KU Leuven this is supported by LINOV, which covers a.o.t. the open university and permanent education. It is not yet clear which role the government has played in its development.
- At universities, there are special arrangements for professional sportsmen and artists
- In colleges, and sometimes in universities (e.g. teacher training), placements in firms are part of the curriculum.
- The system of 'exams organised by the Flemish Community' allows people to take exams in a university or college (since 1994 for all courses) without attending courses (for practical work and so on special arrangements can be made).
- Advanced courses can be organised as well in universities as in colleges. But the government has stopped financing them because of an uncontrolled expansion of the course supply. As a result, universities ask higher fees for entering these courses.
- '*Hoger Onderwijs voor Sociale Promotie*' (higher education for social advancement) is a form of education that takes place outside the regular office hours and often works with modules. Mostly they are one cycle courses. They are targeted at people

with professional experience, with the aim to improve their professional skills or to obtain a diploma that does not relate to the profession.

- A model project '*leren en werken*' (learning and working) will start in September 1998.

A decree is in preparation that will restructure permanent education.

1.3 .involvement of external stakeholders in internal processes

e.g. design or adaptation of teaching programmes, formal participation in internal governance structures, involvement in teaching.

The role of the government towards the involvement of external stakeholders in internal processes of higher education institutions is not clear. Apart from some stipulations in decrees, no clear policy is pursued. The involvement of external stakeholders can only be seen on three occasions:

- legal representation of the socio-economic and cultural organisations in the board of directors of universities and colleges
- partnerships university and business: university spin-offs, professorial chairs financed by banks and firms, e.g. Generale Bank, Cera Bank, Unilever, Electrabel, Petrofina), PhD in engineering, contract research
- Colleges are more directly related to the economy: they have to use '*beroepsprofielen*' (vocational profiles) to structure the '*opleidingsprofielen*' (training profiles) and they have to organise placements.

1.4. In addition, specific to Flanders: output-financing

A new tendency in the educational policy is to introduce output-financing mechanisms. Universities are financed in this way for their doctoral studies and teacher training. Doctoral studies are financed on the basis of doctoral training and the presentation of the doctorate (i.e. the number of doctoral diplomas). Teacher training is financed on the basis of the number of students, who got the diploma (i.e. the number of diplomas of '*geaggregeerde voor het onderwijs - groep 2*').

Since 1997 colleges who organise advanced teacher training get an additional amount of money, depending on the number of diplomas for advanced teacher training that they granted in the preceding year. Likewise a supplementary budget (in 1996: 26.6 million BEF) has been included in the budget for colleges, to be distributed among the

colleges who organise teacher training of an academic level and based on the number of such diplomas each college granted in the preceding year.

W. Nonneman has studied the possibilities of output-financing (TORB 1996-1997 / 3). He suggests that institutions can follow two strategies. They can either start selecting in a severe way (because unfit students cost them money), or they can start letting more students move to the next year. Therefore, quality control is necessary.

2. analysis of the policy content and process

2.a. general

- governmental views on the economic role of higher education institutions?
- governmental views on its responsibility with respect to this role?
- relation of these views with views on other educational policy issues?

On several occasions, the Flemish government has acknowledged the importance of adaptation of higher education institutions to demands from the economy, especially the labour market. It has made some provisions in decrees to promote cooperation between higher education institutions and economic actors (see below, the provision of services). But in line with its fundamental decision for autonomy, it does not strictly impose the way in which higher education institutions must adapt to the economy. The government of course has certain expectations, but these are more implicit than explicitly stated (in decrees and so on). The Flemish government believes that by creating a framework of rules that gives higher education institutions the greatest possibility of responding to economic and societal demands, these implicit goals can and will be achieved.

Minister of Education Van Den Bossche puts it this way (TORB, 1996-1997 / 1): "The expectations of the government, in exchange for an almost full government financing, are great, but except for the mission description in the decrees, they are stated too little explicitly."

The Flemish government itself speaks of a "new policy philosophy: a philosophy rested on a totally new relationship between government and the educational field, whereby the government sets out the beacons of the policy, provides the means for the realisation of this policy (envelope-financing) and grants the widest possible freedom to the educational field for this realisation." (Vlaamse Raad, Stuk 546 (1993-1994) Nr. 1). The governmental responsibilities are: 1) to specify the task and identity of

each type of institution, 2) to grant autonomy to these institutions (including the field of personnel and employment policy), while imposing a certain kind of organisation structure, and 3) to provide their basic funding.

1) The higher educational system in Flanders is a binary system. Since 1970 two types of higher education are distinguished: university education and non-university higher education. The non-university sector is split in college education of one cycle (of 3 years duration) and college education of two cycles (4 or 5 years). From 1988 onwards, the Flemish government has tried to specify the particular role of each of these types, although it acknowledges that the distinction is not always (and can not always be) clear. One of the reasons for this indistinctness, is the 'vocational drift' of the universities and the 'academic drift' of the colleges. In this way, their relation becomes competitive both in terms of recruitment and in attracting private funds. The Universities Decree of 1991 and the Colleges Decree of 1994 define the task and identity of the respective institutions. Universities are characterised by the interaction between education and research, colleges (*hogescholen*) by the interaction between education and labour market. More precisely, universities must provide academic education, scientific research, and scientific services. Colleges on the other hand must guarantee college education, thematic scientific research, and services to society.

These definitions already show that the Flemish government recently has put more emphasis on the unity of the higher education system. Regulations concerning the two types of higher education are being attuned. This means that the legislation on *hogescholen* is fitted in with the legislation on universities.

2) The Flemish government strongly feels the need of securing the quality of higher education in an international context. It emphasises that it is important for education institutions to be able to adapt dynamically to changing demands and European initiatives. "Quality education is more than just a transfer of knowledge. It also implies preparing young people for the society of tomorrow, including the labour market." (Van Den Bossche, L. (1995) Beleidsbrief: School maken in Vlaanderen). Therefore, the Flemish government believes that autonomous higher education institutions are required. This is in line with the above-mentioned policy philosophy and principles. As far as colleges were concerned, the government felt that this autonomy had to be complemented with a scaling-up. Otherwise they would not be

able to cope with the high quality demands regarding the technological knowledge, social skills, and flexibility of their graduates. This increase in scale (from 163 to 29 colleges) has been enforced by a revision of the subsidising system, which favours larger units.

State institutions have been given an independent legal status, but the make-up and powers of administrative bodies are established by decree. Private institutions have a greater freedom of organisation, but staff and student representation are legally imposed. All institutions must organise both an education board and a research board. All this has resulted in a new, contemporary, dynamic and professional management. The Flemish government thought that, as a consequence, the quality of higher education would also improve. A new quality assessment system has been introduced, based on self-assessment, peer review and site visit. The system is to a large extent the same for universities and colleges. The governmental control concerns only the product (control in retrospect). Another guarantee for quality is the legal prohibition of an uncontrolled expansion. The range of subjects offered by each university is established by decree, as are eleven fields of study and the basic courses within each field for colleges.

3) Autonomy finds its counterpart in accountability. The price that higher education institutions have to pay for being able to develop a personnel and financial policy and so on, is the system of a fixed budget granted by the government (envelope-financing). Because the Flemish government aims at "affordable quality", institutions must make adequate use of the (limited) financial resources provided by the government, and must try to attract private funds. They can do the latter by capitalizing their 'third role' of providing services. Recent decrees guarantee the safeguarding of their interests, compensation of their costs, and a just share of the proceeds. But although cooperation between higher education institutions and between these institutions and industry is encouraged (the decree on the provision of services encourages scientific services provided by the higher education institutions for industry and business (e.g. through contract research) and the participation in spin-offs), overall the proportion of government financing remains very large. The Flemish government strongly believes in the necessity of guaranteeing the normal functioning of higher education institutions and in the supplementary nature of private funds.

According to senior civil servants, the government has granted so much autonomy to the institutions, that it now has too little control over them. The one instrument that the government has left to push higher education institutions in a certain direction, is the provision of financial incentives (the 'innovation policy for higher education' grants 38.5 million BEF for 10 projects concerning innovations in higher education as far as technology and content are concerned, i.e. ICT projects).

2.b. policy dimensions

2.b.I. policy problems

- main policy issues in the three clusters? main options to deal with them?
- e.g. a work force perceived as lagging behind in certain skills, quality of teaching programmes deemed as inadequate from the perspective of the labour market.
- how translated in policies / programmes?

On 1 January 1989 the educational independence of Flanders was established. This was a turning point for higher education in Flanders. Up till then, the habits and traditions of the Belgian state made it impossible to really pursue an educational policy. Problems that existed weren't stated explicitly. Before 1989, educational policy was centralised, showed little professionalism and was hampered by '*verzuiling*' (pillarisation).

a) a strongly centralised educational policy

The minister and his cabinet were the key policy makers. As a result of the functioning of the '*Schoolpactcommissie*' the parliament did not show much interest in educational matters. Several commissions, councils and associations could advise the minister, but in a non-binding way. On the other hand, pressure groups could influence the policy making process because they had direct access to the minister.

The '*Schoolpactcommissie*' was established to uncouple educational problems and their solutions from political majorities. The members of the commission all were MPs, but it was not a parliamentary commission. A consensus had to be found between all political parties, and once found, this consensus was a binding advice for the minister.

The cabinet, i.e. the ministers' own staff, had the same political colour as the minister. Its members were often imposed upon the minister by organisations of his '*zuil*' (pillar). Because the cabinet is closely related to the minister, its composition changes when another minister enters office.

The administration on the other hand was (and still is) a permanent institution. But it also was very politicised.

This centralist way of policy making especially affected the state institutions. The free universities were relatively autonomous. Verhoeven (1982, p. 131) states two reasons for this: 'It was probably thought that the deeper questions of belief should be left untouched for fear of setting off irreconcilable conflicts. Another reason has been that university education has always been regarded as necessarily autonomous and organised by free initiative'.

b) little professionalism

Because of the rapid succession of governments (see annex), the educational policy was weakened. No co-ordinated long-term plans could be made, no permanent evaluation or control system could be established, no educational professionalism could be developed. The lack of statistical data fortified this situation.

c) '*verzuiling*' (pillarisation)

The division of the educational sector into several '*netten*' (educational networks, i.e. schools are grouped in networks on the basis of their legal status: organised by the Communities (= state or official education), by the provinces or municipalities (= grant-aided official education), or by private persons or organisations (=free education)) has long historical roots and is part of the pillarisation which encompassed all societal sectors and which accompanied the individual 'from cradle to grave'. The principle of freedom of choice, confirmed in the '*Schoolpact*', reinforced the pillarisation in the educational field. It entails that pupils / students must be able to choose between a free (confessional) and a state (neutral) institution. The two big educational networks tried to reinforce their identity, thereby seeking support by political parties.

d) saving plans

In 1980, part of the educational authority was given from the national state to the communities. But the regulation showed a large degree of complexity. Moreover, as a result of saving plans from the government (e.g. '*St-Anna-plan*') the communities didn't have the necessary financial resources to develop an educational policy. These saving plans were a consequence of the economic crisis, that started with the oil crises in the seventies, and the subsequent growth of the public debt.

From 1989 onwards, these meta-problems belonged to the past. After this period of waiting until the federalisation had taken place, the emphasis could be placed on the organisation and the content of education. Quality now becomes a major point of attention.

The policy letter of 1995 states that the pass rates are a problem. Next to this, it says that the quality of the university course supply, at least in the long term, will need consideration. To optimise the course supply to a European and international level, the self-image of the universities is an obstacle. Minister of Education Van Den Bossche (1995) says: "The traditional logic whereby each institution seeks when and how it can complete its course supply horizontally or vertically is out of date."

The organisation and the spread of courses of colleges are another problem. Before 1994 the number of colleges also was a major problem. The huge number of institutions and courses made quality control impossible.

The quality of the course supply and the low pass rates have a negative effect on the level of schooling of the labour force. This might indicate that the doesn't match the labour market demands. And that effects the position of Flanders in the 21st century.

It thus seems that the Flemish Government perceives the level of schooling of the labour force as the central problem (from 1995 onwards). This is shown for example in the attention that is paid to lifelong learning. Thereby the organisation of this lifelong learning implicitly is stated as problematic and is seen as one of the major challenges for the forthcoming decades.

2.b.II. nature of policy objectives

- aimed at creating major changes, moderate changes, or maintaining/sustaining current behaviour?

- directed at what level (whole system, specific institutions, ...)?
- how many aspects (such as internal structures, curricula qualifications for student entry) affected?

Clearly, the objective of the autonomy-directed policies is to change the behaviour of the higher education institutions. Although education never is too expensive, the budget for education is nevertheless limited and must be kept under control. Through fixed budget financing of higher education institutions, the Flemish government tries to invoke a more professional management. In turn, this should make possible a more adequate use of funds, and therefore should improve the quality of education.

Successive decrees have coherently changed the whole system of higher education. Almost at the same time when the University Decree was established, another decree granted legal personality to the state universities. The college structure was reformed within the same philosophy and therefore was shaped with the universities as an example.

The reforms are so radical, that all regulation concerned has to be re-examined. It makes no sense to re-apply all of the existing laws and decrees. This would only lead to even more complexity. Therefore the decrees aim at integrating as much of the preceding legislation as possible, thereby striving for uniformity.

To enhance the quality of course supply is a clear governmental goal. This goal concern universities as well as colleges. In both cases a major change in the behaviour of institutions is aimed at. Universities must stop thinking that they can be complete ('*volledig*') universities and will have to strive to be valuable ('*volwaardig*'). Towards colleges Van Den Bossche states (1995, p. 18): "The changes that are based in the decree, are radical in such a degree that the course supply from 1998 onwards will be fully examined and evaluated. The colleges will have to learn to make efficient use of the autonomy they now have. Deregulation and autonomy must not be excuses to withdraw from agreements about a rational organisation and spread of the course supply."

Another goal of the Flemish Government is to improve the pass rates. Regarding higher education it aims at maintaining current behaviour of institutions. The universities have to continue current guidance structures for (new) students (in 1998

the audit-commission Mertens has put this guidance system into question). At secondary level more attention should be paid to choice of study and orientation. Next to this, the transition from secondary to higher education should be improved.

The development of a lifelong learning system can also be seen as a governmental goal. But this seems to be limited to a moderate change of behaviour. The university decree of 1991 introduced two new forms of post-academic education to meet (and stimulate) the demand for continuing education:

- additional education ('*aanvullende opleiding*') since 1991: An addition to or broadening of an academic course of the second cycle. This education leads after one year to the degree of '*Gediplomeerde in de aanvullende studies van ...*'.
- Special training ('*specialisatie opleiding*') since 1991: Post-academic education to deepen or specialise in a certain discipline. Two third of this training consists of education parts not learnt in an academic education of the first or the second cycle. This training leads after one or two years to the degree of '*Gediplomeerde in de gespecialiseerde studies van ...*'

A comparable system was established for colleges.

2.b.III. normative basis (policy ideology)

- dominant conception of the role of higher education?
 - values and beliefs that policies are promoting or based on?
 - changing discourse of higher education/economy relationships?
- e.g. Keynesian vs. liberal frame, human capital vs. state-planned.

The governmental view on the role of '(higher) education in a modern society' is as follows. Education has to follow up developments in society, but must also stand critically towards them. It should not be separated from reality, but must neither be a slave of everyday illusions. This means a.o.t. that education will have to play an important role in the evolution towards a knowledge society. It must also contribute to the development of a modern civil society, by offering young people a broad general cultivation and giving them the instruments that they need to position themselves in a modern society. Education and higher education are considered to be crucial for the development of modern citizenship.

The discourse about higher education and economy has only taken shape since 1989. In the preceding period no clear statements were made regarding this topic. Verhoeven (1982, p. 131) remarks that the government did not pursue a policy

towards universities: 'Legislation about universities was limited to four areas: (1) the organisation of the state universities; (2) stipulations of subjects to be taught for 'statutory degrees; (3) financial provisions for universities; and (4) appropriations for scholarships and bursaries'. A fundamental, normative discussion was avoided out of fear for setting of insoluble conflicts.

2.b.IV. policy instruments

- information: messages, campaigns, ...
- money: contracts, subsidies, cash-incentives, ...
- law: does a policy legally require or prohibit higher education to act in certain way?
- organisation: new public units, changing of existing one, abolishing them.

The Flemish government uses the flow of government financing as the most important policy instrument to influence or steer higher education. Because legislation cannot be directly applied to the private institutions, it often imposes measures by making subsidies depending on voluntary changes by the institutions.

For a large part, the absence of strict regulation is an important 'instrument' as well.

In the area of organisation several measures were taken: establishment of the Flemish Education Council (*VLOR*), granting of legal personality to state universities, legally imposing governance structures (with a formal representation of external stakeholders).

The Flemish Government uses the instruments of information, money, law and organisation.

The policy letter of Minister of Education Van Den Bossche contains information about the way in which higher education should develop according to the Flemish Government and stresses the need for a change in the way of thinking. The report on the optimisation of university education of R. Dillemans also provides information on the governmental ideas about the university sector.

The use of the steering instrument 'money' can best be seen in the financing system of colleges. In 1994 the earmarked grants for the colleges were changed into lump sum funding, which provides these institutions more freedom in governing than before the reform. Because the new funding system is partly based on the number of

students, the Flemish government was able to lead the non-university higher education sector in the desired direction. The minimum size which institutions must maintain to be eligible for funding and minimum enrolments by programme at different sites within the same institution for the colleges have forced mergers. Together with the fixation in the Colleges Decree of the fields of study in which colleges can offer courses, this has led to a more transparent provision of courses, which was a desire of the representatives of the professional field.

The use of law as an instrument is obvious: the decrees of 1991 and 1994. But we must keep in mind that the policy of deregulation has not succeeded (Popelier, TORB 1997-1998 / 1). There have been a lot of rules, brought together in heterogeneous collective decrees, and there have been a lot of changes to these rules (education decrees 1 to 10). Both decrees (1991 and 1994) have been followed by repair decrees (27 January 1993 and 19 April 1995 respectively).

The instrument of 'organisation' was used when the colleges were amalgamated. It was aimed at establishing a rational organisation and spread of courses.

The establishment of a quality assessment system and quality control is also an 'organisation' instrument to arrive at enhancement of the quality of higher education.

2.b.V. policy linkage

- over time and over policy fields: identified with other policies?
- co-ordinated with other policies?

- Companies are granted fiscal advantages for their expenses with regard to the education and training of their employees.

- Measures concerning the transition from secondary to higher education, e.g. foreknowledge tests, study choice guidance by psycho-medico-social centres.

2.b.VI. policy networks / main actors / policy processes

- which actors in higher education policy making?
- role of these actors regarding the three clusters?
- dominant arena?
- converging or diverging ideas? how dealt with conflict?
- main events in these policy networks?

The description given here and the schemes in the annex, are not an adequate expression of the complexity of the network. A more complex, dynamic and complete description is needed and will certainly form part of the definitive national report.

Since 1989, formally the dominant arena is the Flemish Parliament. But in reality, the Minister of Education and his cabinet, and the administration are the key actors, although they have to take other actors into account as well. Which actors these are, depends on the topic under consideration, but generally are VLIR, VLOR, VLHORA, SERV, the trade unions, and the umbrella organisations of organising bodies.

The law of 7 July 1970 reorganised the non-university sector. This law envisaged the establishment of a '*Hoge Raad*' (High council) for each of the eight types of higher education (technical, agrarian, economic, social, pedagogical, paramedical, artistic, maritime) and a co-ordinating '*Vaste Raad*' (Permanent Council). The composition and functioning of all these councils were only legally established in 1977 (KB 18 December 1977, changed by KB 13 August 1985). According to the latest legal rules, these councils had to consist of 22 members, among them three representatives of the economic and social life, directly connected to the kind of education under the authority of that particular council.

All these councils were united in VLOR (Decree 31 July 1990). The VLOR has a '*Raad voor Hoger Onderwijs*' (Council for Higher Education) with three sections: a section for university education, a section for college education of two cycles, and a section for college education of one cycle. This council also has members who represent the business sector (just like the '*Algemene Raad*' (General Council), where 4 out of 37 members represent the economic and social sector - these are nominated by the *SERV*).

When in 1988 Flanders became fully responsible for its own education system, very soon a political agreement was reached between the four major parties in the Flemish Parliament (*CVP*, *SP*, *PVV*, *VU*). This agreement took up an idea that had for longer been lingering in Flanders, but could not be executed in the existing structures, i.e. establishing an Autonomous Council for Community Education (*ARGO*). The double role of the Minister of Education, namely being responsible for state education as well as for the whole educational system, was thereby abolished.

This shows that the main decisions are taken between political parties. This was obvious for D. Coens, at that moment Minister of Education: "Of course the trade unions were not involved in this, only the four political parties which represent the largest part of the Flemish population." (Vlaamse Raad, Stuk 161 (1988-1989) Nr. 4). Several commission members agree that the right procedure was followed: political parties take up their responsibility.

The political parties operate in the Flemish Parliament. Whereas in the seventies and eighties competences were granted to the executive power through general laws, now this tendency is turned the other way round. All initiatives taken by the Flemish Government, must be approved by Parliament.

Only after an agreement has been reached, the Flemish Socio-Economic Council (*SERV*) and the *VLOR* can advise on it. But their role, and that of other actors must not be underestimated. They are consulted thoroughly before decisions are taken. For university education the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*VLIR*) is of particular importance. In the field of college education the Flemish Colleges Council (*VLHORA*) has recently been established. Furthermore there are the representatives of (the umbrella organisations of) organising bodies (*inrichtende machten*: *ARGO*, *VSKO*, *CVPO*, *OVSIG*) and the trade unions (*COC*, *ACOD*, *VSOA*).

2.c. sources of information

- documents: inaugural declarations, government budgets, green and white papers, new legislation, minutes, research reports or studies.
- interviews with key actors in three clusters, focused on more recent events and developments, used to specify, complement and correct the document analysis.

* documents

- inaugural declarations and minutes are readily available, but they don't address education.
- policy letters: the first policy letter about education was issued in 1995. In the meantime two have followed.
- new legislation: the decrees of 1991 and 1994 are most important, but the education decrees 1 to 10 (which a.o.t. partly change the decrees of 1991 and 1994) must also be taken into account. Before 1989, there were some laws classifying the non-university sector.

- only a few research papers could be found about policy towards higher education and the national economy.

* interviews: All interviewees confirm that economic factors did not play a direct role in the reforms of higher education.

3. contextual factors

3.a. the relationship between the university and non-university sector

main issues:

- role of university and non-university respectively in the three clusters?
- non-university sector used to influence behaviour universities with respect to their economic role?

specific aspects:

- when non-university sector formally established? arguments?
- restructurings? arguments?
- governmental views on binary line?
- views on co-operation between university/non-university?
- expectations with respect to the relationships in the near future?

* role of each sector

Colleges are more directly related to the economy: they have to use ‘*beroepsprofielen*’ (vocational profiles) to structure the ‘*opleidingsprofielen*’ (training profiles) and they have to organise placements. Governmental steering is stronger towards colleges than towards universities.

* The non-university sector was established as a continuation of secondary education.

* restructurings

- Since 1985 some courses were brought from 2 years to 3 years of study. This process was fortified by the European Directory of 21 December 1988 on the comparability of diplomas. Since 1990-1991 all courses are at least 3 years of study.
- The decree of 1994 has amalgamated the colleges, because many institutions were too small to guarantee quality education. The decree of 1994 causes major changes in the college sector: a new funding mechanism and related to this, the amalgamation of colleges. More changes are to be expected from 1999 onwards: a college will only be permitted to continue operating a site if it has more than 200 finance-eligible students there. Each college will only be allowed to operate a

maximum of four sites starting in the same academic year. From 1999 a college will only be allowed to organise the same course once at the same site, and the same course may only be organised at two different sites if they were already in existence when the decree came into force.

- The university sector will be restructured after Dillemans has completed his assignment. Dillemans, honorary rector of KU Leuven, was given a mandate by the minister of Education to develop a plan for the optimisation of the university course supply.

* binary line

There has been an evolution from a threefold to a twofold system, and now a convergence can be seen. According to OECD, strong features of convergence are the scale of enrolment, overall and within programmes; partnerships with industry; and the recognition of the common quality of studies and research, e.g. two cycle programmes who establish a joint study programme with foreign universities. But not everybody shares this opinion. Some government officials stress the differences between universities and colleges (a difference in mission rather than in organisation). The convergence between universities and colleges is obvious in the decrees of 1991 and 1994. The colleges decree is obviously based on the universities decree. 'Both tertiary education sectors teach the 'same' degree (two-cycle programmes). Institutions in the two sectors are becoming more similar in terms of scale of enrolment, overall and within programmes; partnership with industry; and recognition of the common quality of studies and research. In both sectors control is more and more exercised in retrospect. The government provides the necessary financial resources, but holds the institutions accountable for their use within certain minimum limits'.

* co-operation

Co-operation between universities and colleges is permitted: the mission of the colleges is the provision of '... project-based scientific research in collaboration with a university or other body in this country or abroad'. The decrees provide possibilities for co-operation, e.g. in contract research.

3.b. the European dimension

- who represents your country in the development of European programmes?
- have special units been set up to deal with programmes of the EU?
- has parliament formally discussed any of the programmes?
- role of European programmes in national policies? To what extent have they affected the content of national policies?

* units and representatives

Vlaams SOCRATES-agentschap (Renilde Reynders)

NARIC: Departement Onderwijs - AHOWO/CIA (Daniël de Schrijver)

LEONARDO-agentschap

SOCRATES-comité

* some programmes had to be formally discussed (see the applicability of European legislation)

* there is disagreement among the interviewees about the importance of European legislation in the national policies

3.c. Government approach to policy making and state control / steering of higher education

- domain of government interference?
- to what extent and on what issues have higher education institutions had autonomy over decision-making? arguments for/against such autonomy?

The government creates conditions and determines target standards with regard to quality (Van Den Bossche, Beleidsbrief 1995, School maken in Vlaanderen', p.9). Central concepts in the Flemish steering model of higher education are autonomy and accountability. In a certain sense the reform of the Belgian state structure in 1989 was a revolution. The Flemish coalition agreement therefore states a radical fortification of the autonomy and the responsibility regarding the entire educational system. But the government doesn't withdraw completely: "It proposes minimal goals, promotes certain social priorities, secures a number of vital interests and rights, especially for the weaker, and to that aim provides the necessary resources in exchange for clear agreements (Van den Bossche, 1995, p. 12).

In principle control is executed in retrospect. Therefore a quality assessment system was established. The execution of this system is the responsibility of the institutions themselves.

This obvious decentralisation in comparison with the period before 1989 has increased the autonomy in decision making of the institutions, but has to be seen with nuance. One could argue that the autonomy is restricted by allocating specific fields of study and courses to particular institutions, by reducing the number of courses (the scaling-up operation in the colleges) and by introducing study points. Of these limitations the first two seem to be the most important, because they can influence the course supply. Theoretically the Flemish Government thus has an indirect steering mechanism.

Another possible limitation of the autonomy of higher education institutions is the appointment of a government commissioner at each university and college. The commissioners at universities have the competence to check the legality of the policy of the university board and to evaluate this policy using the criterion of the financial balance of the institution. When a commissioner does not agree with a decision, he can appeal to the Flemish Government. The government then decides if the university policy can be sustained or has to be changed. A comparable system is established for the colleges.

Moreover, all purchases of goods and services surpassing 1,250,000 BEF have to be visaed by the commissioner. The university board can take the final decision in this case.

Although this is a centralised element in the higher education regulation, universities and colleges aren't much restricted by it, because that same regulation grants them a large amount of autonomy.

20 years of Belgian governments

Tindemans I (25 April 1974 - 18 April 1978)

Tindemans II (3 June 1977 - 11 October 1978)

Vanden Boeynants (20 October 1978 - 18 December 1978)

Martens I (3 April 1979 - 15 January 1980)

Martens II (23 January 1980 - 3 April 1980)

Martens III (18 May 1980 - 4 October 1980)

Martens IV (22 October 1980 - 1 April 1981)

Eyskens (6 April 1981 - 21 September 1981)

Martens V (17 December 1981 - 14 October 1985)

Martens VI (28 November 1985 - 15 October 1987)

Martens VII (21 October 1987 - 14 December 1987)

Martens VIII (9 May 1988 - 29 September 1991)

Martens IX (29 September 1991 - 25 November 1991)

Dehaene I (7 March 1992 - 21 May 1995)

Dehaene II (23 June 1995 -)

From Flemish Executive to Flemish Government

Geens I (22 December 1981 - 3 February 1985)

Geens II (10 December 1985 - 2 February 1988)

Geens III (3 February 1988 - 18 October 1988)

Geens IV (18 October 1988 - 7 January 1992)

Van den Brande I (21 January 1992 - 19 October 1992)

Van den Brande II (20 October 1992 - 20 June 1995)

Van Den Brande III (20 June 1995 -)

The policy making process

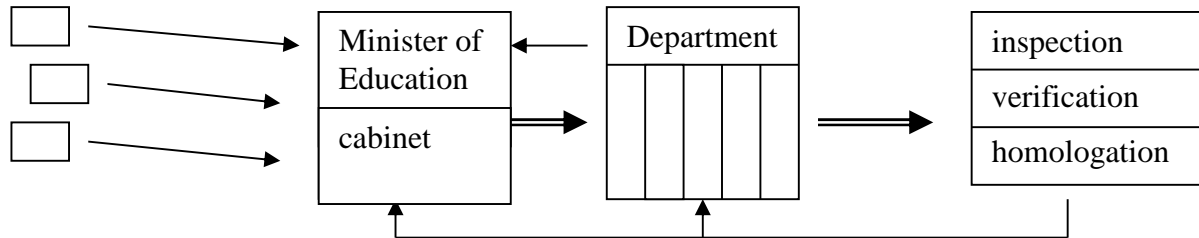
Until 1980

policy information
and advice

policy making

policy execution

control



From 1980 until 1989

the same, but with an own administration for Flanders

From 1989 onwards

